

2

Parliament vol 3.

THOUGHTS

K.

O N

EQUAL REPRESENTATION.

OPINIONIBUS VULGI RAPIMUR IN ERROREM,
NEC VERA CERNIMUS.



L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR R. BLAMIRE, STRAND.

SOLD BY B. LAW, AVE-MARY LANE; RICHARDSON
AND CO. ROYAL EXCHANGE; AND R. FAULDER,
NEW BOND STREET.

M·DCC·LXXXIII.



T O

THOMAS POWIS, Esq;

S I R,

PERHAPS it may seem extraordinary that this work is addressed to an independent country gentlemen, rather than to some eminent leader of one of the contending factions ; but as it treats on a subject in which the country gentlemen are particularly interested, the author thinks he acts with the utmost propriety in dedicating his work (such as it is) to you. Though he does not subscribe to all your political doctrines, yet he is convinced, that you have never taken a part in any question of importance, without having given it the fullest consideration ; and that on every such occasion, you have always
been

been actuated by your own conviction, and by a zealous wish of serving your country. The part you have taken on the question of the representation, does equal honor to your judgment and integrity : the author wishes there were more characters of the same stamp as yourself ; such as are not afraid to stem the tide of faction, and to stand out boldly in opposition to a measure, however popular, and however plausible. Having no borough connections yourself, the voice of malice cannot ascribe your conduct to any sinister motives ; for malicious men will always endeavour to discover inducements which may influence the conduct of the purest characters : when this question is again brought forward, that you may oppose it with the same success as before, is the sincere wish of the author, who has the honor to be, with great respect and esteem,

Your most obedient, and

Most humble Servant.

THOUGHTS

ON

EQUAL REPRESENTATION.

SO much has been said already on the subject on which these pages treat, that perhaps it will be thought impertinent and superfluous to offer any new observations on it to the public inspection; conscious however as I am of the rectitude of my intentions, as also of the attention I have given the subject, I am not without hopes, though well knowing the inferiority of my abilities, of throwing some new light on a subject on which so much has been said already.

Without any further preface, then, I shall enter into the design of this work; in which I propose to prove, that equal representation never had a place in the British constitution; that it would be inexpedient and impracticable to change the constitution for the purpose of introducing it; and that

B if

if such a measure could at any time be justifiable, this is the most improper time to adopt it. To prove that an equal representation never had a place in the British constitution, is a very easy task indeed, and little need be said on the subject. That there was no representation of the people indeed before the year 1264; and that from that time to this, it has been a representation of property, not of numbers, is pretty generally known: it may be necessary however to evince this fact, to say a few words on the constitution of parliaments, from the first to which the commons were assembled, to the revolution; from the last period to the present time, we shall need no explanation, as it has not in the least varied. There is every reason to think, as I before stated, that the commons were not summoned to parliament before the year 1264; of this opinion are Brady, Sir R. Filmer, and Johnson: and though Petyt, Prynne, Speed, and Holingshead think the commons were summoned at an earlier period, yet I do not think they produce any sufficient evidence in support of their assertions. Petyt and Prynne are even of opinion, that the commons had a share in our national assemblies from the earliest period, and that they even constituted a part of the Witten Gemot, the assembly of our Saxon ancestors: this however is mere matter of speculation, unsupported by a single iota of proof, and there-

therefore will have little weight with those who will not be satisfied with assertion in the place of argument: Holingshead, Speed, and Stow are of opinion that to the parliament in the year 1118 the commons were summoned; but as no such writ of summons subsists previous to the year 1264, and as many records on less important subjects of an earlier date are still to be found, it is fair to conclude that in that year the commons were first summon'd; the writ of summons in the year 1264 to the sheriffs of counties directs them to send "duos milites singulorum comitatum et duos de discretioribus et legalioribus et probioribus tam civibus quam burgenfibus suis" from the cities and boroughs. This parliament so summoned never met; but in the year 1265, 49th of Henry the 3d. the famous parliament met, which was certainly the original of our present parliaments. The house of commons varied in its form for some time; till the reign of Edward the 3d. it was not a distinct body, and had not even a speaker; the same King dismissed them in the year 1332, when he retained his lords and counsellors to advise him in the matters of moment which he had to propose; and a few years after, the commons themselves declined giving their advice on the ardua regni, promising to comply with the determinations of the nobles. Previous to the reigns of the Tudor family, the king, nobles, and clergy possessed the great property of the nation:

the *liberi homines*, whose rights were established by magna charta, were very few indeed, compared with the body of the people, who consisted of vilains or slaves, who were the property of the king, barons and prelates, and were transferred from one to another in the same manner as the soil they cultivated: granting money seems to have been the great business of the commons formerly, as it is now their most valuable privilege; but so far were they from considering it then as desirable, that many instances have occurred of boroughs on account of poverty, and for other reasons desiring to be excused from the burden of sending representatives.

The king in those times was in possession of large landed property of his own, and he had recourse to parliament only when his necessities obliged him: the barons, clergy, and knights of the shire had the chief property, except what arose from trade and manufactures, (little comparatively speaking in those days) which belonged to the cities and boroughs; it was therefore thought right that as the latter possessed a certain share in the national property, that they should partake of the common burden: the chief business of the commons being to grant money, they were called together but seldom, and were assembled for a short time, being dismissed, as was before said, when the king retained his lords and counsellors to advise him; but in the process of time, owing to a variety of

of

of events, the commons became possessed of a much larger share of property than heretofore, and consequently of that power and respectability which always, or at least generally accompanies property.

To this great change two acts, passed in the reigns of Henry the 7th and 8th, evidently greatly contributed; I mean the act in Henry the 7th's reign, enabling the nobles to sell, and mortgage their estates, and that in Henry the 8th's reign, for abolishing monasteries, and vesting the property in lay hands: to these evident and immediate causes of the increase of property in the commons, may be added the slow, and almost imperceptible advances of commerce, by which a great influx of wealth coming into the hands of merchants and traders, enabled them to avail themselves of the permission given by the act of Henry the 7th. to the nobles; these circumstances flung a great weight into the hands of the commons, which they did not before possess, and of course increased their power, which continued to increase, till it was at last glutted with the blood of a martyred king. During the reign of James the 1st, and even in that of Queen Elizabeth, the power of the commons was arrived at a great height: in the glorious reign of the queen indeed, it was not so much felt; the great glory to which she raised this country by defeating a very formidable attack on it, her love for her subjects, the patriotism, and good intention of her

her ministers, were so evident, that it would have been dangerous for the commons to have opposed her materially in the very dawn of their power : but in the reign of James the 1st, her successor, the case was much altered : James was a learned pedant, more fit to sit in a professor's chair, and to determine scholastic disputes, than to wield a sceptre, to keep within proper bounds contending factions, and to preserve the prerogative of his ancestors : of that prerogative he had high notions indeed, but he had neither the abilities or popularity of his predecessor to assist him in his pretensions : besides, he took no care to conceal the cloven foot ; he declared at all times, and on all occasions, that it was presumptuous in a subject to determine what a sovereign prince might not do in the plenitude of his power : declarations of this kind served to put those on their guard, who were before sufficiently prepared to check the increase of the prerogative, and even to reduce it considerably : James, towards the latter end of his reign, became sensible that the spirit of the times would not bear his vast ideas of the extent of the prerogative, and perhaps he began to suspect (what had long been found out by others) that his abilities were by no means equal to the task. Happy had it been for his son if he had not sprung from such a father : with the best intentions, the mildest, and most amiable disposition, joined to abilities by no means despicable, he seemed born to

to govern a free nation, and to make it happy ; but unfortunately both for himself and the nation, he had imbibed ideas of government by no means compatible with the feelings of a free nation, and which the temper of the times was particularly averse to : the principles he held had been those of his predecessors ; but he did not seem to recollect, that the change which had then but lately taken place, made it necessary to govern by very different principles from those in which he had been bred : his great fault it must be confessed, was obstinacy, which he dignified (as is often the case) with the name of firmness ; he thought it disgraceful, and incompatible with his dignity to give way to his rebellious subjects, till it was too late ; he at last yielded indeed, and if those who opposed him, had closed with his offers, he would in all probability, taught by adversity, have become the best monarch that ever swayed a British sceptre : but however right the parliamentarians had been in the beginning of the contest, and however they might have had the good of the nation at heart, certain it is, that in the sequel their leaders had nothing in view but their own private interest : Well meaning men were induced to take a part in the beginning, who wished when they found what was likely to be the event to draw back, but it was then too late ; those who had made use of their assistance to aim at power, found themselves strong enough

enough to act alone, and openly scoffed at them for having been the tools, and the instruments of an ambition so fatal to their country; the contest ended by the murder of the king, and the destruction of the constitution. When once political reformation begins, there is no knowing where it will end; God forbid that any present projected reformation should have such or similar end as has been here described! For my own part, when once political reformers are encouraged to scrutinize and undervalue the constitution, I am sure no good can arise, and much fear great evil may be the consequence, both to us and our posterity.

I cannot conceive that any of the friends of the proposed political reformation will say, they wish to see the constitution destroyed; and if not, let them seriously consider the steps they are now taking, compare them with the measures of the reformers above-mentioned, and consider whether the same beginning is not likely to produce the same end: remonstrances, committees of correspondence, and associations are the same things in fact, nor do they even differ materially in name from those which brought about the fatal event above recited. That there are sober well inclined persons amongst the favourers of this measure, I will readily allow; let them therefore take the reins into their hands before it is too late; ere they have plunged the dagger into the vitals of their country,

country, or, which is much the same, not restrained the hands that were about to do so. But to return; the government which took place immediately after Charles's death, fully proves the ill consequences of innovations; the distractions which followed have been too well described by our best historians, to need a recital here. Every Englishman who feels the blessings and benefits of the constitution under which we have the happiness to live, must shrink back with horror at the recollection of the distresses of those times; when civil liberty fled from the country, and when the king and the constitution were destroyed by the sacrilegious hands of those, who were bound by every tie that can influence the human mind, to support and defend them: at last, however, appeared the dawn of better times with the restoration of the royal family; many concurring causes tended to produce that great event; the immediate agent indeed by whom it was brought about was Monk, but the fact is, the people could not be happy without their ancient government, and probably there never was any revolution which took place with such an universal concurrence of all parties and descriptions of men.

It must be confessed however, that the people in general were so much pleased at having recovered their long lost king, that they went into the contrary extreme from that which they were just emerged from;

and had well nigh unhinged the constitution, and flung it off that just equipoise on which it hangs, and by which alone it subsists, by throwing all power into the hands of the king: “but Charles (as Bolinbroke says of him) whatever notion he had of hereditary right, owed the crown he wore to his people, as much as he would have been bound to do, in reason, in justice, in honor, and in prudence, if he had stood at the greatest distance from it in the course of lineal succession, and had been called to it from the low estate in which he was before, by the free gift and choice of the nation.” Thus far Bolinbroke, to which may be added, that he was of an indolent disposition, well enough pleased with the power he possessed, and not wishing for more, till urged on by his brother (who with more extensive ambition, had more confined abilities) he at last attempted to subvert our liberties; but it was happily then too late; the people were recovered from the frantic joy which they felt at the restoration, and they were determined to preserve their liberties by a firm, though temperate opposition to all attempts to subvert them. Charles died before he had made himself completely odious to his subjects, whose prejudices were originally very strong in his favour. His successor’s schemes were vast, but ill laid, and worse executed: he thought he could have buried our religious and civil liberties

liberties under one common ruin ; but, like another Sampson, he pulled an old edifice over his head, which was rebuilt at the revolution. In the new building (if we may hazard the allusion), the graces of Grecian architecture were added to the solidity of the Gothic : The opposition to James was as *firm* as that to his father, though at the same time it was much more moderate ; though he attempted to destroy our civil and religious liberties at one blow, he lost only his crown in the attempt ; whereas his father, whose force was exerted against our civil liberties only (to put it in the strongest light), lost not only his crown, but his life : the opposition to James was slow, but determined ; it was not the opposition of a faction, but of a whole nation ; such a case never before occurred ; and God forbid we ever should see the time, when it may be again necessary for the whole nation to join as one man in opposition to the monarch.

The revolution which at this time took place, introduced new principles and new measures ; those who had the chief hand in promoting it, took every step that occurred to them for the security of the constitution ; but at the same time that they wished to improve, they saw it would be unwise, and dangerous to alter it in essentials : they provided for the freedom of elections ; enacted more explicit laws, defining the privileges of the subject ; and adopted such measures as

occurred to them for the suppression of bribery, and corruption : amongst the rest were the bill of rights, passed by the convention parliament, and the bill to reverse the quo warrantos issued, in the two late reigns, against the city of London, and many other places : in short, after a long, deliberate consideration, the constitution was fixed on nearly the same footing as it now stands : the great and wise men of those days (and greater and wiser men never lived), saw clearly the excellency of the constitution, at the same time that they perceived a few abuses had crept in ; those abuses they remedied, but they rejected with contempt all insidious attempts for the subversion of the constitution, which, whatever slight faults it might have, they knew to be founded on wise and good principles.

By the short review which has been here taken, and the cursory remarks made on it, from the year 1264 to the revolution, I have proved, that the constitution, through a series of years, has been arriving at that perfection which it attained at the revolution : I have proved (or, I think I have proved), that equal representation is so far from being a principle of the British constitution, that the commons were not even summoned to parliament till the year 1264 ; that long after that time their power was trifling in comparison to what it now is, and that for some time they were called together only to vote money,
and

and not to consult on the *ardua regni*: I have also proved, that the power which the commons afterwards acquired, arose chiefly from the change of property, which took place in the reigns of Henry the 7th and 8th; and I think it must be pretty clear to every one who has studied the history of our parliaments, that *property*, not *numbers*, has always been represented. The act of the 10th of Henry the 6th, states as a grievance, that which is now so favourite a measure with many well meaning people; for the preamble to it recites, that “Whereas the members for counties have been chosen by *excessive and outrageous numbers* of people, it is enacted, that there shall vote in future but those only who have freehold of 40 shillings by the year clear of all deductions.” This act clearly states the idea our ancestors had of the mischief of too popular elections. The petitions for equal representation in general state, “That the petitioners are truly sensible of the *original excellency* of the British constitution, which they wish to be restored.” I trust, my countrymen are not to be deceived with a ridiculous jingle of words, to which no precise meaning can be annexed. It has been already shewn, as I think, beyond the possibility of controversy, that the constitution underwent perpetual changes previous to the revolution; but amongst all these changes, equal representation never existed for a single

gle moment : the wise discovery of the propriety of that measure, was reserved for the ingenious patriots of the present day.

I know not what the petitioners mean by the original excellency of the constitution ; and I am sometimes tempted to think they have no meaning at all ; it sounds well certainly, because under the name of friends, they conceal their rooted enmity to our glorious constitution ; but it is the duty of the real friends of that constitution, to expose their designs, to drag the traitors into daylight, and not permit them to stab their country under the pretence of patriotism, to which they have no claim. If the petitioners wish to introduce the feudal system, as the original constitution, let them say so : if they wish to have the Saxon witten gemot, let them declare it ; and may I hope, at the same time, that they will give us an accurate description of the constitution of that assembly, on which the best, and ablest antiquaries have been so much divided, and which probably is reserved for their profound learning, and erudition to explain : at any rate, we may reasonably hope to be informed, what is that original excellency of the constitution which we have lost ? I ask the question, as wishing to be informed ; and if none of them either can, or will inform me, I shall take it for granted, that we have had no such loss, but that the constitution now subsists in its full meridian splendor.

It

It would be mispending my own time, and (what is more precious) that of my reader, to say any more on this part of my subject; but I will suppose, for the sake of argument, that although equal representation never did exist under the present constitution, that that is not a sufficient reason why that measure should not be adopted; I shall therefore say a few words as to the expediency, and the practicability of it.

It is natural enough to ask, when any material, and important change is to be made, what benefits do you expect to result from it? I would therefore wish to know of the friends of this measure, whether they are prepared to say, that the most popular elections are generally conducted with the greatest propriety, and decorum; that the members are chosen with the greatest impartiality, and in the most unbiaſſed manner; that the wealthiest and best informed men are always chosen by the greatest number of electors; and that (in Dean Tucker's words) the members for the city of London have so much more sense and ability, than the members of Old Sarum, inasmuch as they are chosen by a greater number of electors? I am well convinced, if these questions are answered candidly, they must be answered in the negative. Every one knows, that at the most popular elections, decency and regularity are not at all attended to; that the dregs of the people are most obnoxious to bribery and
cor-

corruption ; and that at popular elections in general, bare-faced impudence joined to ignorance, will outweigh and triumph over modest truth ; these facts are so well known, and so generally acknowledged to be true, that it would be insulting the understanding of any man of common sense to undertake to prove them.

I believe it will be allowed by all thinking men, that the chief bar to the influence of the crown, is, and must be, the power of the aristocracy, and of the great commoners, whom I consider in the same situation. We have traced from its source the present power and authority of the commons, and it would be no difficult task to trace the decline of the prerogative, and of the influence of the house of lords. The increase of the power of the commons has kept nearly an equal pace, with the decrease of that of the other two branches of the legislature. The right of the crown to negative acts which have passed both houses of parliament, and the right of the house of lords to refuse their assent to a bill which has passed the commons, though still existing in name, are extinguished in fact ; no instance has occurred since 1692 (fourth of William and Mary), of the king's refusing his assent to an act which had passed both houses of parliament ; nor is it, I believe, likely, that in these times any minister would be hardy enough to advise his Majesty to refuse his assent ; the minister
who

who would choose to give such advice, must have more courage than those of modern days. “*Le Roi s’Avise*na” is an answer to an act of both houses unknown in these times, and is, I believe, likely long to remain so. We say the king has a right to choose his own ministers; and it is undoubtedly his prerogative so to do: but how long could a minister direct the helm, who was chosen in direct opposition to the sentiments of the commons? Any one who knows any thing of modern politicks, will answer without hesitation, not a day; what then becomes of his Majesty’s right to appoint his own ministers, when he knows, if he does not appoint such as the commons approve, the whole business of the nation must stand still? and he places his favorite in a post of such imminent danger, as no man of common ambition would have any taste for.

As to the power of the lords, I believe I shall not be contradicted when I say, that they would not choose to reject a bill which the commons had very much at heart. I put it in this way, because perhaps I shall be told, the fact is otherwise; the lords have lately rejected a bill which passed the commons: I allow it to be so; the contractors’ bill, in the year 1780, after passing the commons, was rejected by the lords. But it is a fact well ascertained, that this bill was by no means a favorite with the commons, tho’ by some accident it had passed through a thin

D

house.

house. I should be sorry to see the time when this assertion of mine may be proved ; but if the lords should ever be so imprudent as to reject a bill, in the success of which the commons much interested themselves, I should really dread the consequences. What effective power then has the king and the house of lords ? It may seem unconstitutional to say so, at first sight, but it is a fact, that all the power they have in the legislature, is founded on the influence they have in the house of commons. The power of government in that house must always be considerable, or all the business of the nation must stand still ; and we have seen, within a very short time, that this influence, much as it has been complained of, is not sufficient to keep in a minister when the sense of the nation is against him. As it is right that the government should have an influence in the house of commons for the purpose of carrying on the common business of the nation, so also is it right, that the lords should have an interest there also, which, joined with that of the great commoners, is often called in to oppose the influence of the crown, when it is attempted to be improperly exerted. It being established therefore, as I think, that the influence here contended for, is just and necessary, what would be the consequence of equal representation, and its favorite attendant, annual parliaments ? The consequence would be, that the executive power, the
peers,

peers, and the great commoners, would lose all their present proper interest, and would be forced to attempt to acquire power by the baneful means of bribery and corruption, (which is so far from being contended for here, that the author wishes we had more severe laws for the discouragement of such great abuses), in that case, the crown must encourage fatal vices, which have already gained too much ground, or else (together with the house of lords) become a mere cypher; all power would center in the house of commons, and that house of commons chosen probably from the dregs of the people; our government would degenerate into the worst of all governments, namely, a democracy, with all the expence and trouble of a monarchy; as the title and trappings of a king would be preserved as long as it might please the *then* high and mighty commons of Great Britain.

Educated with the utmost reverence for the constitution, having always lived in habits of intimacy with those of the same opinion, I own I never can subscribe to the new-fangled doctrine of “Vox populi, vox Dei.” If we are to be governed by a mob, farewell to our religious and civil liberties forever; we may preserve the forms of our ancient constitution, but when the essence of it is destroyed, the preservation of the mere forms will only appear a mockery to those Englishmen who may continue to

venerate it. That the Vox populi is nothing less than the vox Dei, I am fully convinced, and that it is ridiculous, and even impious to call it so: those who are serious in asserting it, must have extraordinary ideas of the Deity. The mutability of the populace is too trite an observation to need a comment here. Do the people desire to-day what they wished for yesterday? will the hero of to-morrow be the hero of next week. Perhaps, an appeal might be made to the king of the people to prove that mutability, of which perhaps his *popular majesty* has, by this time, no doubt. If then the people are so little to be trusted, if they are so fickle and inconstant, what must we think of those who say they have serious intentions of making them our masters? for they will be so whenever equal representation and annual parliaments are adopted.

It is very certain, that the most plausible speaker will always please the mob best; and it is as certain, that a truly honest, well-intentioned man either has not in general, or despises those talents by which the populace are caught. Conscious of his own integrity, of his wish and determination to serve his country well, he hates and avoids professions; whilst the man who never had any thing in view but his own private advantage, is not nice, or cautious in making promises which he never means to perform: thus the worst men generally have the most influence
with

with the mob ; and thus the vox populi may rather be called the vox diaboli than the vox Dei.

But, say the advocates of equal representation, it is very hard, that the city of Westminster should send no more members to parliament than the most inconsiderable borough in the kingdom. But if these gentlemen will please to consider a little, they will soon see, that though Westminster, and Old Sarum send each two members to parliament, those members when they come into parliament, ought not to consider themselves as representing only the place by which they are chosen ; they become members of the British legislature, and as such they represent the whole body of the people of Great Britain ; the interest of the particular places for which they are chosen ought only to influence them, when that particular interest is connected with the public good ; wherever it clashes with that good, it must be immediately given up. I will venture to say, that any member of the British parliament, who considers his duty to be different from what has been here stated, either does not know it, or wilfully neglects it.

With respect to the claims of London and Westminster, particularly to a considerable increase in the representation, I have only a few words to say. When we consider the great advantages which these towns, forming an overgrown Metropolis, already enjoy
over

over the rest of the kingdom, we shall hardly allow those claims to be well founded; the constant drain from the country to feed this overgrown monster, by which our vitals are in a manner devoured, and the immense sums of money brought from the country to be circulated in the metropolis, one would think, ought to satisfy it, even without the many other obvious and glaring advantages which it already enjoys. As to Westminster particularly, let us consider who are, generally speaking, the inhabitants of it; and those who spend most of the money which is circulated there. Country gentlemen, who either are representatives in parliament themselves, or are represented already by members chosen in their respective counties. What would the city of Westminster be, if the parliament did not meet there? very inconsiderable in comparison to what it now is. I believe, any other city in the kingdom would joyfully and gratefully accept of the advantages which Westminster enjoys, without wishing for an increase of the number of its representatives.

I cannot but think however, that it will be necessary before such a change is made in our constitution, that the advocates of the measure should prove, what disadvantages arise from the present formation of parliaments; for if there are no disadvantages in the present mode of representation, why should we run the risk of a change? Is our house of commons too dependent on the crown,

crown, or any particular set of men? Do they suppose, that when every tinker and taylor throughout the kingdom is permitted to vote, that parliaments will be chosen more freely and indifferently? I hope however, that if I am told, that such a change as is proposed, is absolutely necessary, that those who tell me so, will not content themselves with asserting it, but will give me some reasons for their opinion; that at least, if I should be inclined to change my opinion, I may seem to do it from conviction, and, not like a great and learned gentleman in a certain assembly, change sides without any other conviction, than that it is my interest so to do: The abilities of the person I allude to, will perhaps in his opinion bear him out in whatever he does; but an honest man, with a common plain understanding, can have nothing to support him but a consciousness of acting right.

However, under this constitution, lately discovered to be so full of faults, this country has risen to the highest possible pitch perhaps of human glory; a great minister, not fond of romantic, utopian schemes in general, ~~and who~~ (whatever his principles and professions might be in opposition) plainly saw, when he came into administration, that any plan for altering the constitution, not only was improper in itself, but would not even please the bulk of the people; may the Son profit by the experience of his Father; may he never give the nation cause
to

to *execrate* that name, which is now almost adored in every part of the kingdom: his abilities are certainly great, and if his heart is equal to his head, this country may derive great benefit from his services; but let him dread the *vengeance* of his injured country, if he should dare to attempt an alteration of the constitution under which he was born, and which he is bound by every tie that is dear, or sacred amongst men, to reverence: he has it now in his own power to determine what posterity shall think of him; it is at least a matter of sufficient consequence to call for his most serious consideration; his good sense is too well known to have it supposed, that he could take a part in any measure for the sake of heading the mob; his attempt to alter the constitution therefore, will be attributed to a deep-rooted enmity to it.

I have lately seen many writings endeavouring to prove the propriety, and indeed the necessity of a change in the representation; but I not only have not found any arguments to convince me of the utility of it, but in fact, I have found no arguments at all. A pamphlet, called *Lucubrations* during a short Recess, has been the most generally read, and is the most usually quoted: but much as I really respect the author, whom I know to be an honest, independent, well-meaning man, and though I believe he has taken his part on this subject from the purest motives, I cannot help thinking, there is
more

more of assertion than of proof in his work. He says, in the 22d page, that “ the affected
 “ term of constitutional alterations, or what
 “ are called experiments in the government
 “ of the state, will have little weight with
 “ any but very weak and timid politicians ;
 “ there might be some foundation for such
 “ an alarm, had it been attempted to intro-
 “ duce new principles into the constitution,
 “ but it can be of no avail against any plan
 “ tending to confirm those very principles,
 “ on which the constitution is founded.” I
 have quoted the whole passage, lest I might
 be suspected of misrepresenting an author for
 whom I have the greatest respect : in this pa-
 ragraph, the author first assumes a fact, and
 then reasons upon it ; he says, the plan he
 proposes tends to confirm the principles on
 which the constitution is founded. Where
 is his proof ? I defy him to produce it. Has
 he, throughout his whole work, even endea-
 voured to prove, that equal representation
 ever did exist ? How then can his plan,
 tending to make the representation if not in-
 tirely equal, more so than at present, be said
 to confirm the principles on which the con-
 stitution is founded ? The constitution knows
 no such principle as that which he proposes,
 and must be altered before it can be intro-
 duced. Even the number of the house of
 commons at different periods has materially
 varied : in Edward the 1st’s reign the num-
 ber consisted of 169, in Henry the 6th’s

E

of

of 300, and from Henry the 8th's reign to Charles the 2d's, there was an increase by the creation and restoration of boroughs, of 200; since that time there has been no change except at the union. To prove that equal representation existed at the periods abovementioned therefore, it will be necessary to shew, that the number of the people has varied as much as that of the representatives; a difficult task this, even for my ingenious author; but he has a curious way of solving every difficulty, he has recourse to assertion, and I agree with him, that assertion is much easier in some cases than proof; and if the public will be satisfied with the first, he is very right in not undertaking the last, as his success in it would be at best but very problematical. I must own myself to be one of those *weak, timid* politicians whom he mentions in the paragraph quoted above; in such weakness, such timidity, I exult; if it is weak and timid to doubt whether our constitution can be altered for the better, I am happy in sharing those appellations in common with many of the best, the ablest, and the most independent men that this country can boast of: I cannot like to see our glorious constitution destroyed, or at least frittered away, to please any speculative or practical reformer, however great his abilities, or however good his intention may be.

The same author proposes giving a compensation to such of the boroughs as he
means

means to disfranchise: does he consider those boroughs as infamously venal and corrupt, or does he not? If he does think so, his compensation would reward them for that corruption for which they deserve the most severe punishment; and if he does not, he will please to consider, that those boroughs which have preserved their independence, will certainly not choose to give up their franchises for money; they will not, like Esau, sell their birthrights for a mess of pottage, but will consider *such an offer* as adding insult to injustice: they feel their own consequence, as having a right to send representatives to the British parliament, and they will not think themselves less aggrieved if the proposed change takes place, because they are wronged under the shallow pretext of expediency; and the grievance coming under the form of law, will make their case worse, as it will deprive them of their last, and indeed their least privilege, that of complaining.

I cannot help thinking that even if equal representation was allowed to be eligible and expedient in theory, it could not be reduced to practice: it is allowed by *almost* every one, except a certain visionary, a noble peer, that the whole body of the people, supposed to be about eight millions, cannot with propriety give their votes at elections; if this is so, what becomes of equal representation? for in my poor opinion, the nearer you approach it,

without actually arriving at it, the more injustice you do to those who are excluded from choosing representatives; those who do not choose the members of the house of commons, may plead exclusive, ancient franchises inherent in them, but if you destroy those franchises for the purpose of introducing a more equal representation, what excuse can be made to those who are not admitted to a participation of those privileges, which, according to the principles of the friends of the proposed change, are the undoubted right of every Englishman? May not those who are excluded, address the reformers with the formidable demand, of "Give us our rights."

Who is, if the plan takes place, to fix the number of members each county is to send to parliament, in addition to those they send at present? and who is to determine what boroughs are to be disfranchised? Are the scot and lot and the pot-boiling boroughs to be disfranchised? no certainly, such a measure would be incompatible with the idea of more equal representation; for the elections in those boroughs, particularly of the latter, come the nearest to the favorite plan of the reformers. Are the burgage tenures to be abolished then? no, say some of the friends of *equal representation*, for we have always found that the honestest and most independent men (i. e. their own abettors) have been chosen by boroughs in which that mode of elec-

elec-

tion prevails: in short, objections will be made by some to the disfranchising particular descriptions of boroughs, and by others to the disfranchising any, and certainly there would be a great degree of hardship in taking away the franchises of any body of electors, without any crime being proved, or even alledged against them. I not only think the plan of equal representation impracticable, and ineligible, but I also think it is by no means the wish of the people, unless by the people we are to understand the quintuple alliance: that *great*, that *respectable* body of men have declared their perfect concurrence in the measure, but it will require more eloquence than Sir J. M——ey is master of, to convince me that they speak the sense of the people of England. The measure has been long in contemplation; the people have been encouraged to present petitions in favor of it to parliament: how many of those petitions are presented, and in what manner have many of these been procured? All who have not petitioned, I think I may fairly conclude, are inimical to the measure, for *allurements* of every kind have been held out to induce them to petition: a great majority of the people, will, I believe, on enquiry, be found adverse or indifferent to the proposed change: If that is the case, why force it upon them?

But were it ever proper to make so material a change in the constitution, I should
still

still contend that this is not the time for such alteration; we have now just finished a destructive and ruinous war; is this therefore a time to try experiments? how absurd, how ridiculous, nay how dangerous would it be to dispute amongst ourselves at this time, which must infallibly be the case, if the advocates for equal representation persist in bringing that question forward. It is of such great import to almost every individual in the nation, that no one will be lukewarm; we all know, we all confess we have had too much of party disputes already; fatal, dear-bought experience has taught us, that while we are wrangling at home, our enemies are strengthening themselves abroad. It seems particularly necessary for us now, in conformity to the addresses of the two houses of parliament, to study to improve the blessings of peace, to review our commercial laws, to open (if possible) new sources of commerce for our languishing manufactures, to inquire into the alarming state of the finances of the country, and many other things of equal magnitude, which will find sufficient employment for our best and ablest men, and which if properly inquired into, will certainly be of more utility than any schemes for reforming the constitution, which enthusiastic visionaries may form.

It does not require the gift of second sight to discover, that when once the excellent fabric of our constitution is in the least degree im-

impaired, enthusiasts with the best, and ambitious men with the worst intentions, will soon be found to propose further innovations; an instance of this has already occurred; the county of Flint, one of the petitioning counties, after making the same prayer as is to be found in the other petitions, desires that bishops may not be translated from one see to another, and gently hints that deans and chapters are useless and superfluous. I would wish to ask of our political reformers (in the words of Mr. Fox, on another occasion) how far they mean to go, and when, and where a stop is to be put to the proposed changes? where a stand is to be made, and when we are to say, the constitution is now perfect, enough has been done, and no more shall be attempted? But even should some of the reformers be prepared for such moderation after their favorite plan has taken effect, are they quite certain, that all their coadjutors will unite with them? will they not be told, you think you have gone far enough, we are not of that opinion; you have carried us thus far when we were not able to proceed without your assistance; the case is altered; we now find ourselves strong enough to go alone, and we can and will go further without your help? Thus by degrees will our venerable constitution be destroyed; and it will be no consolation to its friends to be told, we who first began the great work, undertook it from the best motives, and with a determined wish to
do

do our country service, but we at last found that those who acted with us had not the same intentions as ourselves, that they were enemies to the constitution, and wished to destroy it; having discovered this, we quitted them, and did as firmly oppose as we had before supported them. But will this be thought a sufficient answer? no certainly: we shall say, this is no excuse; a child need not be told, that when mobs are once let loose, there is no stopping them; the attempt would be like that of Canute, to stop the tide in its course, and the proposers of it would be equally obnoxious to ridicule as the flatterers of the monarch.

Vain would it be to address myself to the infatuated friends of this measure, I have no hope of convincing them, as they have already resisted the strongest reasoning: but from the independent country gentlemen, I have great, and well founded hopes, that they will exert themselves in opposition to a design big with future mischief, and perhaps absolute ruin to this devoted country: they will be pleased to recollect, that there is but one step from equality of representation to equality of property, and as they ought to go together, perhaps this will be the next scheme that the quintuple alliance may in their wisdom think proper to propose: I have no doubt but that petitions enough might be procured in favour of it from all parts of the country, and that it would be per-

perfectly agreeable to their majesties the mobs of London and Westminster.

The appeals which it has been so much the fashion of late to make to the people, must, I am sure, strike all reasonable men as imprudent and dangerous. The people (or rather the Westminster mob), are not judges of the propriety of great political alterations, nor do even those who appeal to them, think them so; for they generally inculcate sentiments by their inflammatory speeches, and then very pompously tell us; such is the voice of the people, "*Vox populi, est Vox Dei*;" the people must be obeyed, whether their cry is "*Wilkes and Liberty—Liberty, Property, and no Excise*," or whatever else it may be, we must implicitly obey the people without inquiring into the reasons for the opinions they have formed, or offering any in reply to them. Thus the power of an ever-variable and inconstant populace is to be greater than that of any Eastern tyrant, and we are solemnly called upon to fall down and worship an idol made by the hands of men: I hope however, the fiery furnace will not be our lot if we should presume not to pay all the respect to their majesties, which they may desire, or think they deserve.

In the country gentlemen, I say, is my trust; they will not be deceived, I am sure, by ridiculous, new-fangled doctrines unknown to their ancestors; much less will

F

they

they be terrified and awed by the popular opinion respecting this measure; they will with that proper firmness which always characterizes independency, dare to think for themselves; and should the absurdity of this measure appear to them as to me, they will decidedly and vigorously oppose it; and will be perfectly indifferent as to the opinion of the mob, when they know they are actuated by a fixed determination of performing a duty which they owe both to their country and themselves, and from a conscientious discharge of which they will derive sufficient consolation, even if their endeavours in the service of the public, should not meet with general applause.

- “ Justum & tenacem propositi virum.
 “ Non civium ardor prava jubentium.
 “ Non vultus instantis Tyranni
 “ Mente quatit solidâ.”

Recourse has always been had to the country gentlemen, when the leaders of a faction have proposed any thing to the detriment of the country, or the constitution; when appealed to properly, they have never wanted the most ardent zeal; they have exerted themselves with proper manliness, and have resisted every attempt which they thought might affect the happiness of the country, or the *existence* of the constitution.

To every thinking man the times appear big with danger; from the peer to the cobbler

ler all are reformers ; the political tinkers are all attempting to mend the constitution. The proposed alteration may possibly be a favorite with the mob, but how seldom are the mob in the right ! Was not the ostracism fatal to the best citizens of Athens ? Had not Pericles more influence and authority over the Athenian mob than Cimon, or Aristides ? Was not Coriolanus banished from Rome by that mob which owed its existence to his services ; and was not Rome, at various periods, brought to the brink of perdition by the attempts of the leaders of the mob to make *innovations* in the constitution ? I cannot close these observations better than with the words of Cicero, on the *Agrarian law*, which seem so applicable to the present times, that one is almost tempted to think they were spoken with a view to them. “ Multa
 “ sunt occulta reipublicæ vulnera, multa
 “ nefariorum civium pernicioſa conſilia, nul-
 “ lum externum periculum eſt ; non rex,
 “ non gens ulla, non natio pertimescenda eſt :
 “ incluſum malum, *intestinum* ac domesticum
 “ eſt.”

T H E E N D.

ERRATA.

p. 7, last line, instead of aim, read arrive.

p. 13, l. 16, instead of there, read none ; and leave out only, in following line.—Line 19, for states, read shows.—Line 25, for be, read see.

p. 15, l. 21, for wealthiest, read worthiest.

p. 25, line 3, for term, read terror.

p. 28, line 2, for not, read now.



